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Message Text

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ACTION AF-04

INFO OCT-01 NEA-07 ISO-00 L-01 H-01 INR-05 PM-03 PRS-01

SP-02 IGA-01 ACDA-10 OMB-01 TRSE-00 EUR-12 NSC-05

NSCE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 SS-14 /068 W
---------- 061287
P R 041720Z FEB 76
FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5089
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY RABAT

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 NOUAKCHOTT 0282
LIMDIS
3.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR MILI XA MR
SUBJECT: REGIONAL ARMS RESTRAINT STUDY - MAURITANIA

REF: STATE 20621

SUMMARY: HEAVY AND CONTINUING ATTACKS ON MAURITANIAN ARMED FORCES, CIVILIAN POPULATION, SETTLEMENTS, AND INFRASTURCTURE BY ALGERIAN AND LIBYAN ARMED AND SUPPORTED POLISARIO FRONT HAVE FORCED MAURITANIAN GOVERNMENT TO EMBARK ON LARGE-SCALE AND URGENT ARMS ACQUISITION PROGRAM. CRITICAL NEED FOR CRASH MILITARY BUILD-UP NOW IS DIRECT RESULT OF CONSCIOUS GOVERNMENTAL DECISION FOR ARMS RESTRAINT IN PAST. GIRM HAS TURNED TO MOROCCO, FRANCE, AND US FOR MILITARY EQUIPMENT; MOROCCAN AND FRENCH GOVERNMENTS RESPONDED IMMEDIATELY (VIA AIRLIFT) AND ON LARGE SCALE. DURATION AND DIRECTION OF ARMS ACQUISITION PROGRAM WILL BE FUNCTION OF COURSE THAT ON-GOING SAHARA WAR TAKES. ARMS RESTRAINT WILL NOT AGAIN BE A REAL ISSUE IN MAURITANIA UNTIL SAHARA WAR HAS FADED INTO HISTORY. END SUMMARY.

1. AT OUTSET OF ITS NATIONAL EXISTENCE IN EARLY 1960S
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GIRM DECIDED TO DEVOTE ITS VERY LIMITED RESOURCES TO

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DEVELOPMENT AND TO ESTABLISH ONLY ABSOLUTE MINIMUM
MILITARY/SECURITY FORCES REQUIRED FOR TRAPPINGS OF
NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY AND MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC ORDER.
DURING EVERY ANNUAL BUDGET CYCLE SINCE THEN, ORIGINAL
GIRM DECISION HAS BEEN REAFFIRMED IN CONCRETE TERMS:
MODEST FUNDS ALLOCATED TO DEFENSE AND INTERIOR MINISTRIES
HAVE ONLY BEEN SUFFICIENT TO RAISE AND EQUIP (AFTER A
FASHION) A TOTAL OF 2500 MILITARY AND POLICE WITH PERSONAL
WEAPONS (OBSOLETE RIFLES, PISTOLS, AND LIGHT MACHINE GUNS),
A MODEST NUMBER OF CREW-SERVED MACHINE GUNS, A HALF
DOZEN GIFT ARTILLERY PIECES, AND A VERY LIMITED AMOUNT OF
SUPPORT EQUIPMENT (TRUCKS, JEEPS, ETC.). ON NOVEMBER 28,
1975 GIRM AIR FORCE HAD FOUR OPERATIONAL AIRCRAFT: TWO
PUSH/PULL CESSNAS AND TWO BRAND-NEW LIGHT CARGO AIRCRAFT
(SKYVANS) DELIVERED JUST IN TIME FOR FITEENTH ANNIVERSARY
INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATIONS.

2. SERIES OF HARD-HITTING ATTACKS ACROSS TRADITIONAL (I.E. PRE SAHARA)
FRONTIER BY POLISARIO/ALGERIAN GUERILLA WAR-
FARE TEAMS ON MAURITANIAN SETTLEMENTS AND INSTALLATIONS
IN FAR NORTH AND ALONG IRON ORE RAILROAD FUNDAMENTALLY
ALTERED GIRM VIEW OF TYPE OF MILITARY/SECURITY ESTABLISH-
MENT REQUIRED FOR PRESERVATION OF INTEGRITY OF NATION.
REACTING QUICKLY, GOVERNMENT FRANTICALLY EMBARKED ON
URGENT ARMS ACQUISITION PROGRAM. SOME IN AND OUTSIDE
GOVERNMENT DECLARED THAT DEMONSTRATED WEAKNESS OF MAURI-
TANIAN FORCES IN FACE OF POLISARIO/ALGERIAN ONSLAUGHT
"PROVED" THAT POLICY OF STARVING MILITARY IN PAST HAD
BEEN GRAVE ERROR AND MUST BE PERMANENTLY ABANDONED.
SENIOR OFFICIALS WITH SOMEWHAT BROADER AND LONGER PERS-
PECTIVE PLUS DEVELOPMENT-MINDED MPS, BUREAUCRATS, AND
INTERESTED CITIZENS STILL HOPE TO BE ABLE TO LIMIT
REQUIRED CITIZENS STILL HOPE TO BE ABLE TO LIMIT
REQUIRED TRANSFER OF RESOURCES TO NON-ECONOMIC MILITARY/
QECURITY ACTIVITIES TO THE ABSOLUTE MINIMUM IMPOSED BY
THE NEW REALITIES OF REGIONAL RIVALRY AND TO PRESERVE
INTACT MAXIMUM PROPORTION OF DEVELOPMENT EFFORT. CLEAR-
LY, HOWEVER, MILITARY BUILD-UP IS ON RATCHET: DEVELOPERS
WILL NOT BE ABLE FOR SEVERAL YEARS IF EVER TO GET MILITARY
BUDGET BACK TO 1974 LEVEL.
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3. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN (A) WHETHER GIRM HAS OR CAN
OBTAIN FROM ITS EASTERN ARAB AND OTHER FRIENDS THE RE-
SOURCES REQUIRED TO MEET BOTH SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT
NEEDS/GOALS, AND (B) WHETHER PRO-DEVELOPMENT FORCES
WITHIN GIRM AND IN POPULATION AT LARGE WILL BE ABLE TO
FORCE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT BACK ON NEAR BREAD AND
WATER DIET AFTER THEY HAVE SAVORED RICH FEAST OF FANCY

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NEW HARDWARE AND PUBLIC PRAISE.

4. MILITARY AND CIVILIAN OFFICIALS IN GIRM ARE REFRESH-
INGLY REALISTIC IN THEIR CURRENT ASSESSMENT OF THEIR
ABILITY TO ABSORB AND USE COMPLEX MILITARY HARDWARE.
THEY KNOW THEY DO NOT HAVE AND WILL NOT HAVE FOR SEVERAL
YEARS THE CAPABILITY OF OPERATING AND MAINTAINING
SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS (HIGH-PERFORMANCE AIRCRAFT,
MISSILES, TANKS). BUT APPETITES OF PROFESSIONAL MILITARY
COULD CHANGE. REQUIREMENTS IMPOSED BY GUERILLA WAR IN
SAHARA HAVE ALREADY PROMPTED MILITARY TO TALK OF ACQUIRING
RECON-PARATROOP AIRCRAFT OF DEGREE OF TECHNICAL AND OPERATIONAL
SOPHISTICATION WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN UNTHINKA-
BLE THREE MONTHS AGO. THE LONGER SAHARA WAR LASTS AND
TOUGHER IT BECOMES, THE LOUDER AND MORE INSISTENT WILL
BECOME CRIES OF FIGHTING MAN FOR BETTER AND MORE WEAPONS.
AT MOMENT IT IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO GUAGE PRESENT OR
PREDICT FUTURE APPETITE. ONLY HARD INFORMATION AVAILABLE
IS THAT MAURITANIANS HAVE BEEN HANDING NEW ARMS SHOPPING
LIST TO FRENCH ON ALMOST WEEKLY BASIS--WHICH FRENCH HAVE
JUST AS REGULARLY BEEN GETTING AND RIGOROUSLY REDUCING
IN SIZE AND SCOPE FOR QUANTITY AND COMPLEXITY REASONS.
(BUT IT MUST BE UNDERSCORED AND REMEMBERED THAT EXCESS
COMPLEXITY FOR UNDER-EQUIPPED, UNTRAINED, AND INEXPERIENCED
MAURITUCIAN ARMED FORCES FALLS FAR SHORT OF GENERALLY-
UNDERSTOOD LEVEL OF "SOPHISCATED WEAPONS".) IN
SIMILAR FASHION, PRESSURES FOR CONTINUED MILITARY

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ACTION AF-04

INFO OCT-01 NEA-07 ISO-00 L-01 H-01 INR-05 PM-03 PRS-01

SP-02 IGA-01 ACDA-10 OMB-01 TRSE-00 EUR-12 NSC-05

NSCE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 SS-14 /068 W
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AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY RABAT

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BUILD-UP AND SPECIFICALLY FOR ACQUISITION OF FANCY
HARDWARE MAY ARISE FROM CIVILIAN NATIONALISTS AS WELL,
THE LONGER THE SAHARA WAR CONTINUES. STANDARD CON-
VICTION OF NATIONALIST MILITANTS (WHEREVER THEY MAY
BE) THAT NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY IS INCOMPLETE WITHOUT
SQUADRON OF JET FIGHTERS MAY BEGIN TO TURN UP HERE
TOO, AND PUT DEVELOPMENTAL LEADERSHIP UNDER FURTHER
PRESSURE TO CONTINUE AND EXPAND ARMS PROGRAM, EVEN IF
AIRCRAFT ARE CRANKED UP ONLY ONCE A YEAR FOR INDEPENDENCE
DAY FLYPAST.

5. IN SUM, QUESTION OF ARMS RESTRAINT WILL NOT BECOME
REAL ISSUE AGAIN IN MAURITANIA FOR SEVERAL MORE YEARS--
UNTIL AFTER CURRENT SAHARA WAR HAS FADED INTO HISTORY.
THEN QUESTION WILL BE AN ISSUE ONLY IF APPETITES OF
PROFESSIONAL MILITARY AND NATIONALIST MILITANTS HAVE
IN FACT GOTTEN OUT OF HAND, AND IF DEVELOPERS IN
GOVERNMENT ARE UNABLE TO HOLD THE LINE AND FAIL TO
SECURE ALLOCATION OF VIRTUALLY ALL AVAILABLE RESOURCES
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TO DEVELOPMENT EFFORT. WHEN THAT TIME COMES, UNITED
STATES MAY BE ABLE TO WEIGH IN EFFECTIVELY ON SIDE OF
DEVELOPERS, (EMPLOYING TECHNIQUES DEVISED IN PRESENT
STUDY WHICH BY THEN WILL HAVE BEEN PROVED SUCCESSFUL IN
OTHER LOCATIONS). MEANWHILE, JUDICIOUS PUBLICIZING HERE
OF US EFFORTS IN FAVOR OF ARMS RESTRAINT ELSEWHERE
WILL KEEP OUR HOPES AND COURAGE OF DEVELOPMENT PARTISANS
IN MAURITANA.HANDYSIDE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY BUILDUP, GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT, REPORTS, ARMS CONTROL INSPECTION, MILITARY CAPABILITIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 FEB 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: SmithRJ
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976NOUAKC00282
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760043-1180
From: NOUAKCHOTT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760283/aaaacuyz.tel
Line Count: 210
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: 76 STATE 20621
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: SmithRJ
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 03 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <03 JUN 2004 by buchant0>; APPROVED <28 SEP 2004 by SmithRJ>
Review Markings:

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US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: REGIONAL ARMS RESTRAINT STUDY - MAURITANIA
TAGS: PFOR, MILI, PARM, XA, MR
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006